

**Two types of clefts in French:
information structure, existential presupposition and syntax**
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1. INTRO. Whereas *c'est*-clefts (1) are prototypically associated with a focus-background (value-variable) interpretation, *il y a*-clefts (2) are said to have an all-focus ('presentational') interpretation only (see Lambrecht 1988/2001/2004).

(1) Focus-background *c'est*-cleft

Q: *Qui t'a donné ce cadeau?* A: *C'est Jean qui me l'a donné.*

(2) All-focus *il y a*-cleft

Q: What's happening? A: *Il y a mon chef qui arrive.*

C'est-clefts have been well studied (see Doetjes et al. 2004 and many others), also on the basis of corpus research (Dufter 2008), in contrast with *il y a*-clefts, which are relatively under-researched (Willems & Meullemans 2010, Choi-Jonin & Lagae 1997, Léard 1992, Giry-Schneider 1988) and have not yet been described on the basis of extensive corpus research in both written and spoken French.

2. GOAL. Contrary to what has been assumed before, we will first show that both *il y a*-clefts and *c'est*-clefts instantiate all three possible Information Structure (IS)-articulations (all-focus, topic-comment, focus-background) defined by Lambrecht (1994) (section 3) and that the presence/absence of an existential presupposition (EP) in clefts correlates with their IS-articulation (section 4). We will then argue (section 5) that a "high" analysis for clefts, in which the clefted element (CE) is in the clausal left periphery, does not apply to *il y a* clefts, and propose a new, "lower", analysis.

3. INFORMATION STRUCTURE. 3.1. *Il y a*-clefts. We will first present the results of extensive corpus research (in formal and informal written and spoken French: *Le Monde*, *Yahoo Q&A*, *CFFP*) showing (i) that *il y a*-clefts, besides an all-focus articulation (2) frequently have a focus-background (value-variable) articulation (3), as has also been argued for by Davidse (1999/2000) for English *there*-clefts, and (ii) that they can even have a topic-comment articulation (4), with a contrastive topic in Büring's (1997/2003) sense. To our knowledge, this has not been observed before.

(3) Focus-background *il y a*-cleft

Q: *Quelle est votre meilleure série du moment?* A: *"How I Met Your Mother" c'est génial, y'a aussi "Lost" qui est bien* (Yahoo Q&A corpus)

(4) (Contrastive) topic-comment *il y a*-cleft

Ya les gens normaux qui doivent se lever à 10h ou midi et aller au lycée pour la rentrée. Et ya moi qui doit se lever à 4h du matin pour aller à mon lycée sport étude ! (www) ~ With respect to normal people I say that they get up at 10AM, however, with respect to me, I say that I have to get up at 4AM.

3.2 *C'est*-clefts. Besides focus-background (1), *c'est*-clefts have also been said to express all-focus (Doetjes et al. 2004) (5). Moreover, we will show that *informative-presupposition* (Prince 1978) or *non-contrastive anaphoric* clefts (Blanche-Benveniste 2006) (6), have a topic-comment articulation, as Reinhart's (1981) tests (7) show:

(5) All-focus *c'est*-cleft

Sous le sommet en surplomb d'une falaise de la côte sud de l'Angleterre, (...), un peintre amateur attend, rêvant de pouvoir dessiner un corbeau d'une espèce rare. Mais soudain c'est une jeune femme qui tombe dans le vide sous ses yeux (www)

(6) Topic-comment *c'est*-cleft

[tourist guide on Berlin] *C'est dans la section est, autrefois la partie soviétique, que j'ai été le plus charmé (...). De plus, c'est là que vous décèlerez les*

principaux clubs, bars et discothèques. (www)

(7) a. Q: *Que sais-tu à propos de la section est de Berlin?*

A: *C'est là que vous décèlerez les principaux clubs, bars et discothèques.*

b. (6) ~ I say about the East part of Berlin that it's *there* that you will find the main clubs, bars and discotheques.

3.3. Consequence. From 3.1. and 3.2. it follows that, surprisingly, both *c'est*-clefts and *il y a*-clefts can express all three possible IS-articulations.

4. EXISTENTIAL PRESUPPOSITION (EP). According to Reeve (2012), *focus-background it*-clefts in English presuppose the existence of a value that holds for the variable in the cleft relative clause. As far as we can tell, this has not been studied for French clefts. We will show that focus-background *il y a / c'est*-clefts (8) carry an EP, in contrast with all-focus clefts (9) and topic-comment clefts (10), which do not.

(8) **Focus-background *il y a / c'est*-cleft: existence of CE is presupposed**

a. In (3): *at least one TV show is good* = presupposed

b. In (1): *someone gave me a present* = presupposed

(9) **All-focus *il y a / c'est*-cleft: existence of CE is NOT presupposed**

a. In (2): *at least one person is coming* ≠ presupposed

b. In (5): *someone falls into the depths* ≠ presupposed

(10) **Topic-comment *il y a / c'est*-cleft: existence of CE is NOT presupposed**

a. In (4): *at least one person has to get up early* ≠ presupposed

b. In (6): *you will find the main bars somewhere* ≠ presupposed

We will conclude that the EP is not present in *all* types of clefts, but rather, that its presence/absence correlates with the specific IS-articulation of the cleft.

5. SYNTAX OF *IL Y A* CLEFTS. 5.1. We will first argue against a 'high' analysis for clefts (Meinunger 1997/1998; Frascarelli & Ramaglia 2009/2013; Sleeman 2011; Kiss 1998), in which both *il y a* and the clefted element (CE) are in Rizzi's (1997) left periphery: **(i)** the CE does not necessarily have the typical interpretation associated with left-peripheral foci; **(ii)** the CE can undergo *WH*-movement (11), and, hence, does not occupy the single FocP position in the left periphery (see Haegeman, Meinunger & Vercauteren (2009)'s argument against a high analysis for *it*-clefts). **(iii)** Because of its formal variation in tense and mood, as well as its non-referential character, *il y a* cannot be argued to be a pure focus marker (Klein 2012) or a left-peripheral topic. **(iv)** In contrast with other constructions involving a moved left-peripheral focus (Haegeman & Ürögdi 2010), *il y a* clefts occur in temporal clauses (12), which shows that there is no intervention effect between the movement of the temporal operator and the movement of the CE to the left periphery.

(11) *Qui y a-t-il t_{qui} qui joue du piano? = Il y a qui qui joue du piano?* (Fuchs 2009)

(12) *Quand il y a une personnalité importante qui meurt* (CFPP2000)

5.2. We will then argue in favor of an analysis for *il y a* clefts in which **(i)** the expletive *il* is in SpecIP, where it satisfies EPP; **(ii)** the verb *a* (and the clitic *y*) is in I°, the regular position for inflected verbs in French, where it also precedes Cinque's (1999) high (13) and low (14) adverbs; **(iii)** the CE is in its base-generation position and **(iv)** the cleft relative clause is extraposed, as (15) shows (see Hedberg 2000 for an overview of extraposition of the cleft relative clause in *it*-clefts, see also Rizzi 2010):

(13) *Il y a probablement un psychopathe qui sommeille en vous ...* (www)

(14) *Il y avait tout à coup un récit bien plus grand que nous qui traversait ...* (www)

(15) *y'a toi aujourd'hui qui découvre que tout ça est du blabla!* (www)

Selected References. Lambrecht, K. (2001). A framework for the analysis of cleft constructions, 39(3), 463–516. Lambrecht, K. (2001). A framework for the analysis of cleft constructions, 39(3), 463–516. Den Dikken, M. (2013). Predication and specification in the syntax of cleft sentences. In K. Hartmann & T. Veenstra (Eds.), *Cleft structures* (pp. 35–70). Doetjes, J., Rebuschi, G., & Rialland, A. (2004). *Cleft Sentences*.